WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

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Prepared by the Centre for Human Rights and Information Service of the United Nations, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

WORLD CONFERENCE NEWSLETTER LAUNCHED

The United Nations is pleased to provide this first edition of its newsletter on the World Conference on Human Rights. Regular issues between now and the Conference will include news, updates and other useful information for delegations, nongovernmental organizations, agencies in the United Nations system and the media.

For more information about the World Conference, please contact the UN Centre for Human Rights or the Department of Public Information.

Message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations

(The following are excerpts from a statement by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, delivered on 29 March at the Regional meeting for Asia held in preparation for the World Conference on Human Rights. The statement was read on his behalf by Mr Ibrahima Fall, Assistant-Secretary-General for Human Rights. A full copy of the statement is available from the Department of Public Information.)

Human rights has become today one of the central challenges of civilization. People, no matter where they live, increasingly demand respect for their human rights and judge the institutions of society by how well they respond to those demands. Food, shelter, employment, education and access to health-care go hand in hand with demands for respect for culture, equitable and effective justice, the right to participate in government, to express one's thoughts freely and to live one's own moral and spiritual convictions.

The challenge is not only felt on the national level where the institutions of society are more fully developed. The international community also has to face the issue of how well it contributes to the effective enjoyment of human rights. This is the central objective of the World Conference and its preparatory process, the final stages of which we are entering now...

The World Conference, coming at a time of greatly expanded expectations and possibilities for international action, must reflect on more profound reforms in our human rights system. In almost all areas of United Nations activity old barriers to action have fallen and new forms of United Nations involvement are being pragmatically invented; this should also be the case with human rights. And here, I would like to suggest as our benchmark not the smooth internal working of the various organs of the human rights bureaucracy, but real changes in the way people live.

One of the threads underlying all the topics on the agenda of the World Conference is the interdependence and indivisibility of all human rights, economic, social, cultural, civil and political. On the theoretical level we have known this for the better part of this century...

Unfortunately, it has taken much too long for that realization to be applied to the actual protection of human rights in the context of every day life... For individuals in every country need the enjoyment of all their human rights to live a life of human dignity and it is patent today that no society, however well-off, can be isolated from the negative impact of violations of human rights elsewhere.

MISSION STATEMENT FOR THE WORLD CONFERENCE

The following Mission Statement for the World Conference has been issued by Mr Ibrahima Fall, Assistant-Secretary-General for Human Rights. It can be quoted or used to define the goals and objectives of the Conference.

The human rights situation today is one of stark contrasts: while much has been accomplished in the development of international standards and the elimination of political domination, inequality and injustice, widespread violations of human rights continue around the world. Many countries have adopted and are implementing international standards set by the United Nations, but in many others the level of human rights violations that continues is distressing: death, destruction, discrimination, poverty, persecution, rape, slavery, starvation and stunted or blighted lives remain the daily curse of millions of people.

The United Nations, whose purpose is to promote and encourage respect for human rights, has over the years helped to end situations of serious human rights abuses and to bring about democratic governments. Unfortunately, the United Nations has not always been able to act as effectively as it should against human rights violations. This is a central challenge of our time.

Faced with the barbaric conduct and conditions that still exist today, the international community cannot stand idle or indifferent. The United Nations, with the support of the people and Governments of the world, can be a catalyst for global action for human rights.

The General Assembly of the United Nations has decided to convene a World Conference on Human Rights involving leaders from governments, specialized agencies and bodies of the United Nations, international and regional organizations, intergovernmental organizations and nongovernmental organizations. The World Conference will take place in Vienna, Austria on 14-25 June 1993 -- 25 years after the

International Conference on Human Rights in Teheran assessed progress achieved under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, and laid the foundation for implementing subsequent measures and mechanisms.

The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights faces a daunting array of challenges to the achievement of the major interdependent objectives of the United Nations: protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, maintaining international peace and security and promoting economic and social development. In addition to the ongoing violations of human rights in all parts of the world, the international community today faces new and emerging rights problems such as racism and xenophobia, extreme poverty and AIDS.

Thus, the World Conference on Human Rights will:

- Assess the current human rights situation, and highlight achievements as well as failures in protecting or promoting human rights;
- Identify obstacles to protecting and promoting human rights and preventing violations, and ways to overcome them;
- Consider adopting means of making enforcement more effective, including intervention in serious situations;
- Secure the necessary resources to carry out United Nations human rights activities in the future.

Today, more than ever before, it is clear that respect for human rights is crucial to the future well-being of humanity. By enhancing the effectiveness and relevance of the United Nations, strengthening its ability to bring human rights effectively to every community and neighborhood in the world, and speeding action to prevent violations or bring them to an end, the World Conference will launch a new era in the quest for international peace, security and social and economic development.

The promotion and protection of human rights, and prevention of human rights violations, are not only the duty of the United Nations and its Member States, but of each citizen of the world. Thus, the challenge facing us is to launch a worldwide mobilization to make the Vienna Conference the beginning of a new future for human rights.

NEW SLOGAN FOR WORLD CONFERENCE

A new slogan designed to stress the goals of protecting and promoting human rights, and preventing violations before they occur has been coined for the World Conference. It is:

"Human Rights: Know Them, Demand Them, Defend Them."

This new slogan will be incorporated in public service announcements being issued by the Department of Public Information (DPI) to promote the Conference.

Public Service Announcements are also available through UN Information Centres in English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Russian and German. UN Information Centres are asking appropriate publications to print the public service announcements. Additional requests for camera-ready copies of the advertisement are welcome.

New Dates Announced for Geneva Prepcom

The dates for the Fourth Preparatory Committee for the Vienna Conference, originally scheduled to be held in Geneva from 13 to 23 April, have been changed. The meeting will now

be held from 19 to 30 April, 1993, in Geneva. For information concerning registration, attendance, documents or accreditation, write or call the Centre for Human Rights.

TEXT FOR PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

In an effort to further promote the World Conference on Human Rights, the public service announcements will contain the following text:

"Each day violations of human rights condemn millions of men, women and children to indignity, suffering and death. Yet most rights are protected by international legal agreements. How can we improve and enforce these agreements to better people's lives?

"This June, the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, Austria, will seek answers to this question. The United Nations is bringing together governments and human rights advocates to assess where we stand and set international human rights policy into the 21st century.

"Human rights are everyone's responsibility. Join us in taking action, locally and globally: Know your rights, demand and defend them."

Regional Meeting for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok, 29 March-2 April

A regional meeting in preparation for the forthcoming World Conference was held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 29 march until 2 April 1993. The agenda for the meeting included issues relating to the protection and promotion of human rights, implementation of international and regional human rights instruments, consideration of the objectives of the World Conference of particular importance to the region and the role of NGOs in the promotion and protection of human rights at the national and regional levels.

A Special Series of eight programmes on Human Rights is now available from UN Radio on:

1. Evolution of the Universal Human Rights Movement
2. Modern Day Slavery
3. Massive Violations: Torture, Disappearances, Summary Executions
4. Intolerance: Racial, Religious, Ethnic
5. The Rights of Women
6. Indigenous Peoples
7. Poverty and the Right to Development and Health
8. Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrant Workers

To obtain the programmes write to the Department of Public Information.

For more information about the World Conference, write to:

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